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Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

19 April 1983

Japan: Nakasone Contemplates "Double Elections"

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In our judgment, Prime Minister Nakasone probably has not yet made a decision to dissolve the Lower House and go to the polls in conjunction with the Upper House elections which must be held this summer. But he must decide in the near future, and we believe momentum is building in favor of holding double elections. A good showing by the ruling LDP in local elections on 24 April may be the deciding factor.

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The Debate

LDP leaders are debating the pros and cons of holding double elections. Those opposed focus on possible losses of LDP seats in both the Lower and Upper House. Former Prime Ministers Fukuda, Miki and faction leader Komoto are in this camp,

They believe Nakasone is too controversial and that more time is needed to improve his public image before seeking a public vote of confidence. According to the press, even some members of Nakasone's faction, including Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Fujinami, have advised Nakasone that a significant loss of LDP seats is possible. Nonetheless all faction leaders who are opposing double elections are reported to have urged their followers to be prepared for them.

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] Japan Branch, Northeast Asia Division, Office of East Asian Analysis. Information available as of 19 April 1983 was used in its preparation. Comments and queries are welcome and may be directed to the Chief, Japan Branch, Northeast Asia Division, OEA [redacted]

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Those LDP members who believe elections should be held, according to the press, are suggesting 26 June as the most likely date. [REDACTED]

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supporters of a double election argue that:

- Most LDP Lower House candidates have already begun election campaigns on the assumption that double elections will be held in June. A significant portion of their campaign funds has already been spent, and contributors--especially big business--will be reluctant to supply funds again next year.
- Low voter turnout would hurt the LDP, and Upper House elections alone cannot sustain voter interest.
- Despite the Nakasone Cabinet's poor showing in public opinion polls, support for the party itself has changed little.
- The leftist opposition parties are in poor financial shape to conduct a nationwide campaign. In addition, the media are giving wide play to Levchenko's charges in his book that leading Socialist Party members acted as Soviet agents.
- Prime Minister Nakasone could exploit media coverage of his forthcoming trips to the Williamsburg Economic Summit and to ASEAN. [REDACTED]

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Nakasone's Dilemma

Nakasone probably favors a double election this summer to consolidate his political base. However, in addition to concern that the LDP might lose seats, we believe he probably is hesitant because his opponents could charge this action was another demonstration that he is dominated by Tanaka. [REDACTED]

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Outlook

At a 13 April press conference, Nakasone stated that "as a matter of principle" the Lower House should serve out its term--until June 1984--and that he has no plan to hold an early election. Nonetheless, with Tanaka's strong urging, we believe Nakasone privately is edging toward holding double elections this summer. According to the Japanese press, Nakasone considers his low popularity less damaging than the impact of the expected guilty verdict against Tanaka at the conclusion of the Lockheed trial this fall.

As a campaign platform he could cite:

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- Successfully getting the budget through the Diet.
- Implementation of economic stimulative measures in March.
- His promise to consider a tax cut later in 1983.

A watershed could be the local elections on 24 April. Although the press played up LDP losses in local voting on 10 April in Fukuoka and Hokkaido, in reality the party scored impressive gains in most of the 13 prefectures. They gained seats in many local assemblies and councils. If the party does well on 24 April, Nakasone may read this as a sign of national strength and opt for elections this summer.

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